



Do Your Research to Avoid Layaway Surprises

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MADISON – Many stores offer a layaway option to consumers who wish to lock down the holiday season’s hot items without having to pull out a credit card or pay full price upfront. Layaway policies vary widely, so the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) advises shoppers to ask questions and fully research a store’s policies in order to avoid any potential surprises.

“Many retailers offer an online layaway option, which may have different terms than in-store layaways,” said Sandy Chalmers, Administrator of Trade and Consumer Protection. “Make sure you understand the terms and refund policies before you put money down.”

For example, physical stores may require you to make incremental payments within certain monthly timeframes, but the online layaway terms may require scheduled withdrawals from your checking account or through a third-party payment service. Read the fine print on the website closely and call the company’s customer service line if you have any questions before you make a down payment.

DATCP offers the following tips to help research a layaway program:

Layaway terms:

- Find out how much time you have to make all of the required payments, when the payments are due and the minimum payment required.
- Ask about service fees.
- Ask what happens to the contract if you are late or miss a payment. Are there penalty fees? Will your contract be cancelled? Will the merchandise be returned to inventory?

Refund policies:

- If you decide you don’t want the merchandise after you’ve made some or all the payments, can you get a refund? Ask upfront.
- Retailers’ policies may differ: some give you all your money back; others may charge a non-refundable service fee; others may offer a merchant credit for the amount you paid.

Get the merchant’s layaway policy in writing and keep receipts of the payments you make on the merchandise. These documents may come in handy if you have a problem with the seller.

For additional information or to file a complaint, visit the Consumer Protection Bureau at datcp.wisconsin.gov, call the Consumer Information Hotline at 800-422-7128 or send an e-mail to datcp hotline@wisconsin.gov.

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